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Investigating Cyber and Traditional Bullying: Implications for Future Interventions

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Introduction

Bullying has recently become an ever growing form of victimization in the UK. In 2011-12 there were 2,410 reported cases of cyberbullying ("Cyberbullying 'on the rise' – ChildLine"). By 2013 this number had almost doubled to 4,507 cases. Students who were bullied in both cyberspace and school experienced difficulties such as low marks, poor concentrations, and absenteeism (Beran & Li, 2007). The purpose of the current study was to investigate the factors that could influence an individual's willingness to intervene, so that future interventions can be created to prevent bullying and promote pro-social behaviour. Several circumstances were considered in the exploration of when a witness/bystander might intervene in a bullying incident: the group size (Latane & Darley, 1970) witnessing the incident (the number of bystanders), the setting (cyber vs. traditional bullying settings), and the gender of the bullying victim. In addition, several personality traits were also considered, including appraisal of emotions in others and altruism.

Method

Participants & procedure

A sample of 82 individuals participated via an opportunity sample, including 22 males and 56 females (2 missing cases). The average age was 24. The only exclusion criteria of the current study were that participants had to be over the age of 18. All participants were recruited using an online survey.

Measures

All participants were presented with different scenarios to assess and asked to report how likely they would intervene (see scenario overview on Table 1).

Victim	Offline (Traditional Bullying)		Online (Cyber bullying)	
	Small grp	Large grp	Small grp	Large grp
Female	Scen. 1	Scen. 3	Scen. 5	Scen. 7
Male	Scen. 2	Scen. 4	Scen. 6	Scen. 8

In addition, we asked about participants' awareness of press cases of bullying. To assess personality, we used two scales. First, the 10 items from Rushton's (1982) altruism scale. An example item is: "I have donated goods or clothes to a charity" with a response range of (1) "never" to (5) "very often" ($\alpha=.70$; $M=3.58$; $SD=.96$). Second, appraisals of others was assessed using 7 items from the emotional intelligence subscale (Schutte et al., 1998). An example item is: "I know what other people are feeling just by looking at them" with a response range of (1) "strongly disagree" to (5) "strongly agree" ($\alpha=.70$; $M=3.57$; $SD=.74$). Finally, participants are also requested to tell us what resources and contacts they would ask for help. We also asked what help methods the participants were most likely to use themselves if bullied. The study concluded with a few questions about past bullying experiences and demographics.

Results

Previous experience with bullying & social network use

Almost half ($n=38$) of all participants had previous experiences with bullying. 95.1% ($n=77$) used social network sites daily. The Internet was used more for: social networking (30%), studying (22%), shopping (18%), banking (11%), work-related activities (8%), gaming (5%) and other activities (6%).



Intervention likelihood by gender

Group differences were examined using analysis of variance. Female participants were more likely to intervene when witnessing cyberbullying than the male participants. No other significant differences emerged. The present findings (Table 2) suggest gender differences which are specific to context (cyberbullying).

Scenario	Participant gender	M	SD	Sig.	F
Scenario 1	Male	3.45	.739	.931	.008
	Female	3.47	.858		
Scenario 2	Male	2.82	7.95	.933	.007
	Female	2.84	1.06		
Scenario 3	Male	3.00	.816	.347	2.00
	Female	3.21	.929		
Scenario 4	Male	2.68	.780	.167	1.94
	Female	3.02	1.02		
Scenario 5	Male	3.27	1.39	.004	8.90
	Female	4.07	.912		
Scenario 6	Male	3.14	1.39	.011	6.87
	Female	3.89	1.04		
Scenario 7	Male	3.00	1.38	.003	9.76
	Female	3.88	.992		
Scenario 8	Male	3.00	1.27	.042	4.28
	Female	3.61	1.12		

Personality

Higher altruism was also associated with higher likelihood of participants stepping in.

Exploratory Results (Helping Method)

A chi-square analysis revealed that there is a significant association between gender and preferred help methods. Males and females significantly differed in terms of the frequency with which they selected help method 1 (Anonymous chat) ($\chi^2(1) = 4.179$, $p=.041$). Men choose this option less often (obs. vs exp. count: 4/7.9) compared to women (obs. vs exp. count: 24/20). Chi-square analysis also revealed a significant association between past bullying experience and a preference for method 2 (telephone chat) ($\chi^2(1) = 5.184$, $p=.023$). Those who experienced bullying in the past would not use this option in the future (obs. vs exp. count: 0/2.7) compared to those who had no bullying experience (obs. vs exp. count: 6/3.3).

Bullying interventions and recommendations

To date, several different interventions exist, most of these recognise the importance of greater awareness amongst schools, children and parents. We list a few examples. One is called the Bullying Intervention Training (BIT). This training is often used in schools and aims to develop knowledge and skills around transition preparation (in Year 6-Year 7). Another example are e-safety awareness campaigns that teach about cyber bullying and online privacy. Lastly, a new intervention is *StopIt* (Cyberbullying App). This App becomes available in Spring 2015 and allows victims/bystanders to report incidents anonymously, through text or calling.



Top 5 recommendations for a bullying awareness campaign:

- Encourage pro-social behaviour
- Give options / ability to report instantly
- Encouraging reporting to trusted others
- Provide online platform for information seeking
- Telephone chat line – app that gives you information and number



Conclusions

In conclusion, the current research has clearly found that there are context specific variables (online vs offline) gender differences and personality traits such as altruism that can affect a bystander's willingness to intervene in bullying situations. Knowing about these gender differences can therefore be helpful in the development of interventions aimed at reducing cyberbullying by motivating more bystanders to intervene. Those who witness bullying situations still need to be encouraged to behave in ways that are pro social regardless of the context of the situations or their own personality traits.